

Reflection Log Entry

Date: November , 2008

Reflection:

Action and **L**ooking Back:

It was a very exciting, much anticipated day for me today at the Middle School; I was going to be teaching the classes! I had planned to teach my inquiry-based lesson on the three types of symmetry on that Monday morning and I was extremely anxious to start. The lesson was designed to follow a lesson that Ms. Cooperating Teacher was planning to teach on the three types of symmetry. Therefore, we had originally planned that my lesson could serve as a fun, hands-on, follow up activity to further build the students' knowledge on the subject. However, Ms. Cooperating Teacher was unable to get to the initial lesson, so the students had little prior knowledge (or, at least, little *activated* prior knowledge) on the material about symmetry. Therefore, I had to edit and revise my lesson plan on the spot to ensure that the students understood, first and foremost, the three types of symmetry and their characteristics.

I first taught period 4, which is an "at-grade level" class and the students seemed to enjoy themselves throughout the lesson. Overall, I felt as though the lesson went well but also felt as though I definitely could have done better next time. Only 2 minutes after my first class left, period 5 (an "above-grade level" class) piled in and I was able to teach the lesson again. This time, I added more of the challenging questions to my mental question bank as I went around and probed their thinking through inquiry. I also used what I had learned about time management in period 4 to help pace myself through period 5. I also took mental notes that for the next classes, I should take the mirrors that students were using away from them as soon as possible because they had proved to become a rather large distraction. Furthermore, I decided to use my "trigger" words (for example "slide" when looking at

translation symmetry) earlier on in the lesson so that they could start making appropriate associations between the types of symmetry and words that they were more familiar with. While period 5 was “at a higher ability level” than period 4, I feel as though this had little or nothing to do with how much smoother the lesson went.

After these first two periods of teaching, we had our team planning period, so I was able to bounce ideas off of Ms. Cooperating Teacher and the other team members (the science teacher, social studies teacher, English teacher, and resource teacher) about extensions for the lesson I was teaching, and even integration with the other content areas. I then had my personal preparation period, where I went to speak with the special education teacher about the next period (period 2) that day, which I was also planning to present my lesson in. Period 2 are the “below-grade level” students and the special education teacher sits in on the class to provide appropriate aid, accommodations, and modifications to those in need while I continue to teach my lesson. I spoke with her about taking a more hands-on approach with the lesson during this second period class, which we ended up doing and we worked quite nicely as a team to reach the same objectives and standards that were set for the other classes.

During period 2, I allowed the students to take a more hands-on and visual approach to symmetry, giving them more guidance during the Explore phase and more detailed examples during the Launch phase. For the other periods, I had only written down key words on the overhead to help trigger them to write their own, personal definitions and examples. However, for this class, the special education teacher suggested that I write clear definitions for them to copy directly into their notebooks. The lesson went well with this group too, and the students seemed very receptive to my teaching style.

I then taught the final period of the day (period 3), which is another “at-grade level” group. I was, therefore, able to implement alternatives I had constructed after teaching period 4 when I taught this group. I noticed, also, that this group—probably because it was the end of the day—was extremely

chatty and antsy. Therefore, I used many of them as human examples of symmetry to get them up and moving about early on in the lesson, which seemed to help them channel their energy in the right direction and benefit from the lesson, even though it was modified slightly from the other classes in order to appeal to more of the bodily-kinesthetic learners.

Now, I am home reflecting on the lessons I was able to teach today so that I may take time to contemplate what the students were thinking, feeling, and wanting throughout this lesson, and also what I was thinking, feeling, and wanting. I also want to observe how these feelings may or may not have been channeled through our actions.

	Me	Students
Wanting	I wanted to provide the students with a fun, interactive lesson that would help them learn to recognize and distinguish between the three types of symmetry. I also wanted their focus and attention throughout the lesson. Because this was my first time teaching these students, I wanted today to give me the opportunity to get to know each of them a little bit better so that I may better tailor my unit plan to their specific needs and interests. I also wanted to learn whatever I could from them so that I can begin observing how they think about things. I wanted to reach them and introduce them to my teaching style so that they could prepare themselves for me coming to teach them in the Spring. I also wanted them to be creative in their designing of their personal logos so that I could learn more about them through their designs.	I believe that the students wanted to just figure me out desperately throughout this lesson. They wanted to know who I was, how much I knew, how reliable I was, and how I worked in the classroom so that they could adjust their thinking if necessary. The students wanted to learn about symmetry and wanted to work with their friends on the project. They were not exactly thrilled when I gave them the open-ended assignment on using symmetry to represent themselves, because they wanted the typical lecturing-teacher, listening-students classroom set up that they were used to. They wanted me to give them clear direction so that they could try to give me exactly what I wanted, rather than showing me their creativity. Due to their age and development level, they also wanted to talk to each other about the lesson.
Acting	I asked the students many, many questions in order to probe their thinking and discover how well they were understanding the material I was sharing with them. I tried my best to set a comfortable, open classroom environment in which questions were welcomed and appreciated so that they would be encouraged to participate. I let them show me what they already knew during the Launch phase, let them explore their learning during the Explore phase, and then asked them to show me what they	The students were eager to tell me what they already knew about symmetry and seemed excited to explore the new material. They told me what they had learned during the Summarize phase and were not shy to ask me questions when they needed clarification. They gave the rest of the class some great examples and bounced their ideas off of each other to help each other learn and grow from the material. They also treated me with a great deal of respect and expressed their gratitude for offering them what they

	had learned during the Summarize phase. I showed them respect and asked for respect in return. Furthermore, I feel as though I reflected upon and improved my lesson implementation strategies as the day progressed as class periods went by.	found to be such a fun, interactive lesson. Finally, they shared their personal logos with their classmates to show them what they had learned in the lesson and how they were able to use symmetry to represent themselves.
Feeling	Throughout this lesson, I was feeling extremely excited to know that I would soon start teaching a classroom of my own. I was also feeling surprisingly calm and not at all nervous about teaching my first lesson. As the day went on, I was feeling more and more confident in my plan and in my ability to reach each of the students. I also felt comfortable in front of the classroom and felt as though I belonged there. It was a feeling similar to the one you get when you come home for the first time in a long time—a familiar feeling that tells you this is where you are supposed to be. I was also feeling eager (and a little anxious!) to hear Ms. Cooperating Teacher's comments, concerns, and questions on my lesson, and enthusiastic to hear her ideas and feedback on improvement strategies.	I believe, from their facial expressions and loud whispers throughout the lesson, that the students were feeling rather excited to have someone "cool" teaching them (I am assuming they got the idea I was "cool" from the mere fact that I am young). I think they initially felt unsure of having me take Ms. Cooperating Teacher's role for the day but still seemed to feel comfortable asking me questions and expressing their concerns on the material and the assignment. I believe many felt frustrated when I left parts of their assignment open ended to encourage their creativity, but they eventually got to a point where I think they felt eager and excited to express themselves and have the opportunity to show <i>me</i> (the new, cool, girl at school) what they had learned from the lesson that day.
Thinking	Throughout this lesson, I was thinking about how great it would be to have my very own classroom and to mold the minds of my own students. As I was teaching, I was thinking "I hope that they are able to follow and understand me," because I was not yet used to their methods of thinking. I was also thinking, "I wonder if Ms. Cooperating Teacher is enjoying the lesson or if she thinks I am horrible." However, I was also able to see that I was getting through to these students, so I did not care as much about what Ms. Cooperating Teacher was thinking, because I could tell to a great extent that the students were learning. I was also thinking of what might spark the students' interest so I could quickly gain their individual attention. I kept thinking, "I wish I knew these students better so I could reach them more easily." And I was contemplating how I could improve the lesson for the next class.	The students were fairly expressive (at least to my knowledge) in their thought processes throughout this lesson. However, I think many of them were thinking, "Why is Miss Student Teacher actually teaching today? I thought she was just watching us until after Christmas." I got the sense that they felt this way because they seemed confused as to why I would be the one teaching them and asked me questions about it. I think they also thought it was "cool" to have such a young teacher in charge that day, because many of them clearly look up to me already. They were probably thinking about how the symmetry relates to their own lives, as they were constantly being probed to think this way. I believe the students were also thinking of their likes and dislikes of my teaching styles, and may have been thinking that I might judge them based solely on their performance today, since I did not know them very well yet.
Relations	I feel as though I was able to understand the feelings, wants, and thoughts of the students throughout the majority of this lesson, which made the right hand column correlate nicely with the left hand column. I wanted to help the students during this lesson and work with them on distinguishing between the three types of symmetry and recognizing symmetry. I feel that by developing a mutual understanding with them	

	about respect in the beginning helped them to know what I expected of them and what they would be able to expect from me, so that the only surprises were coming from the actual material we were learning, and not from variations of teaching styles and learning styles of both myself and the students.
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Awareness:

After reflecting upon the wanting, acting, feeling, and thinking of both the students and myself, I believe that the heart of the situation, which allowed the lesson to go so smoothly, lies in the fact that I was able to reflect upon my teaching and implement alternative strategies during the class periods that followed each lesson. Because I was given time during the team planning period and personal preparation period to reflect and communicate with other teachers and co-workers, I was able to kick my lesson up a notch and focus on ways to improve the implementation of the lesson.

Keeping this in mind, I believe that another reason I was able to feel so satisfied after my lessons was because Ms. Cooperating Teacher kept notes for me (and even took pictures on a camera she then gave to me!) on various student actions, student responses, and her tips for future lessons. These notes were extremely helpful for me and allowed me to improve my lessons tremendously as the day went on. She was very open in her suggestions, giving me the freedom to implement them or not, without imposing on my personal style. Due to the fact that I was not given a lot of time to reflect in between each lesson, it was very useful to have her insight as to how each lesson went so that with the 2 minutes I had in between periods, I could take a quick glance at the comments she had written down for me.

Another thing that helped me greatly today was how cooperative the students were. They were very receptive to me and seemed to genuinely enjoy the lesson and learn a great deal. As a whole, the students showed me a high level of respect and a level of maturity that I was astonished to

see in adolescents. They were active participants in the class discussion and asked me questions to display their misunderstandings. I feel as though I almost forced them to become active participants by asking tons of questions and always allowing plenty of wait time in between questions. The wait time drove some students in some of the classes crazy, but it *worked*; students had time to gather their thoughts and think about an appropriate response. By the moment the wait time was over, I would see at least five raised hands; students just dying to break the awkward silence. Allowing the wait time was a challenge for me, but seeing how well it worked in the classroom, and how much it drove participation, I am beginning to see that when the students are taking the time to think for themselves, it is time well spent, and I plan to continue using appropriate wait time in future lessons.

The special education teacher was also a great help to me today. Having the opportunity to work closely with the special education teacher has been a great experience for me, as I am able to talk with her about appropriate accommodations and modifications for each specific student in the classroom. She co-teaches the “below-grade level” students with Ms. Cooperating Teacher, so today, she co-taught with me. She was able to give me signals requesting that I slow down and was able to think of diverse ways of explaining things that helped the students understand much better. Between working with her, working with Ms. Cooperating Teacher, and having a great response from the students, this lesson was able to go smoothly and I effectively reached each of the objectives I had set forth. Without the help of this team, my results could have been very different, and I was extremely appreciative to have such wonderful people willing to help me.

Constructing Alternatives:

There were a few alternatives that could have been used to better implement my lesson. For example, I could have done an ice breaker activity with the students before hand to discover a little more about them and set up a comfortable, open classroom environment. Doing so also would have allowed me to practice students' names and find things out about their personalities by observing them through this icebreaker. I feel that getting to know the students is so important in the classroom and it was challenging for me to work with them without knowing much about them or their particular learning habits and styles. Thus, if I were to go back and teach it again, I most likely would have had the students spend 3-4 minutes in the beginning of class doing a quick "get-to-know-me" icebreaker.

I also could have implemented two strategies suggested on the "Advice for Student Teachers" website, <http://www.atozteacherstuff.com/>. One of the strategies I may have brought into the classroom today to help me would be "try to get student input about your lessons." The website suggests talking to a few students and asking them how they think your lesson went. Students are extremely creative and may have had wonderful suggestions for me about how I could plan or implement my lessons in the future. It may have shone light on something that I had never thought about or made me realize that the lesson did not go as smoothly as I had originally thought it had. I think speaking to students about your lessons, therefore, and getting advice from the people who matter most, is a great idea.

Another strategy discussed on the <http://www.atozteacherstuff.com/> webpage was "always plan too much." I did not plan for the case that Ms. Cooperating Teacher would not have taught the students symmetry yet, so I was immediately thrown off course when this information was revealed to me (about 10 minutes before I began teaching). Since I lack experience organizing lessons according to class time, I should have over-planned to ensure that all of my bases were

covered when I walked into the classroom. This being said, I do not feel as though I was *unprepared* for this lesson, only that by planning for worst-case scenarios may have proved to be helpful in this case, so that I could keep my focus on only my objectives and the students.

Trial:

So far, I have not had the opportunity to implement one of my alternative approaches to this problem. As student teaching comes closer, I will remember this situation in case something similar arises as I am student teaching in the classroom, and I will try to implement an alternative solution so that the underlying problem can be solved.

Note from Dr. de Groot:

Because this reflection log was written during pre-student teaching, the teacher candidate could not describe an opportunity to implement an alternative approach. I do expect that during student teaching you have more opportunity to retry things.

Note that the trial phase then is the new Action that you take, which then can lead into a new reflection cycle of Looking Back, Awareness, Constructing Alternatives, and Trial.

In this way the ALACT reflection cycle feeds back into itself. This makes learning to teach an iterative process.